

## My NAMI Presentation

My name is Marie Lennon and I grew up in New Milford New Jersey. For the first 4 years of my life it was just my mom and I. My biological father left when mom was 6 months pregnant with me.

Mom remarried when I was 4 and my stepfather adopted me about a month later. I have 2 Half sisters, one lives in Illinois and the other is in California.

I graduated from New Milford High School in 1980, and after I graduated I started working at a local nursing home as a CNA. I think it was then that I found my love for the Nursing Field. In 1999 I was working at a Nursing Home in Bennington Vermont that was offering a Tuition Reimbursement program. I said to myself that this was my way of getting my nursing Degree, so I took advantage of the program. The tuition for my Nursing Degree was paid for and I had to promise them 2 years of employment after my schooling.

I worked as an LPN for 22 years mostly in Nursing Homes, but I did work at a hospital for 5 years, and did some Home Health Care.

I ended up filing for disability in 2010 due to my increased anxiety and depression.

### WHAT HAPPENED

At the age of 22 I got married and stayed married for 6 years which was 5 ½ years too long. He was physically and emotionally abusive. I have a 70% hearing loss and my Dr. says that I probably had concussions and didn't know it. I was not able to go to the doctor, or even see my family because my husband was concerned that they would figure out what was going on.

On the day I left my husband he was sleeping and my dad was waiting outside. I knew if my husband was awake I would not get out of there alive.

I moved to Shaftsbury Vermont where I lived with my mom and dad. A few weeks later my mom went to New Jersey to visit my sister for a week and I was at the house by myself. One afternoon the phone rang and when I picked it up it was my husband he said "I am coming up this weekend we need to talk" My response was "I have nothing to say to you" He repeated "I am coming up this weekend" and hung up the phone.

I went to the State Police Barracks and explained what happened and showed them the Protective Order I had. They explained to me that the Protective Order I had was only good in the state I got it in was New Jersey.

I ended up going to the Bennington Court House by myself and getting a Protective Order that was good here in Vermont. I was glad that I did.

That Saturday morning the doorbell rang, I was able to look out the window in a spare room and saw that it was my husband with a gun. I called 911 and within 2-3 minutes there were 3 State Police Cars in my parents driveway. They escorted him off the property, and told him if he came Back he would be arrested. One of the officers stayed with me for about half an hour to make sure he didn't come back.

About a month later I went to a Dr. and was diagnosed with PTSD, Complex Depressive Disorder, and anxiety. I remember the first time I had a Panic Attack like it was yesterday, I thought I was having a heart attack.

## WHAT HELPS

I am very lucky to have a supportive family and friends.

I belong to a lovely church and have built a strong connection with quite a few members of my church family.

I have a few hobbies that help, I crochet, I love to read, and my newest hobby is sewing. Since the beginning of the Pandemic I have been making face masks and donating them to Hospitals, and Schools.

The thing that helps most when the hamster wheel in my brain won't stop is music, especially gospel . I have been playing the flute since Elementary School and will on occasion play with our church worship team. Some of the older hymns sound so pretty on the flute, for instance Amazing Grace, and How Great Thou Art.

It was difficult for me to get into counseling on a steady basis. I was on a waiting list for over a year, but since 2016 I have had a steady counselor that I see every other week. I also see a psychiatrist and she works with me on my medications. At first I was on a med for anxiety because of my frequent anxiety attacks. I have since been able to come off the anxiety med and now use a mood stabilizer which works well.

After we found the right dose for my depression medications they are now working well. It took a while to get to the right dose, we would increase the meds maybe 25mg per month until we found a level we were happy with.

## WHATS NEXT

I think my biggest success is my weight loss. This is something I have struggled with for years. The other day I stepped on the scale and for the first time in 30 years I was under 200 lbs.

I am involved in volunteering in my community. I have been volunteering at the local homeless shelter, and have been volunteering as a Peer Mentor with a new program called Power, Voice, Choice, the Citizenship Project. We just finished our first program in December. The program is a 6 month program once a week for 2 hours. These classes help the participant To learn their 5 rights, which are rights, roles, relationships, responsibility, and resources. Each class focuses on a different subject like Stress Management, Family Matters, Financial Health. This program was designed to help clients with previous incarceration, substance abuse, Issues, or social isolation issues to reintegrate back into the community.

Part of my reason for being here today is to tell the story of my Mental Health Journey. If I can help one person to get out of an abusive relationship it is worth it, Also to make others aware of the Stigmatism that goes with Mental Health Issues.

There are a lot of people that think that Mental Health Issues are something you can just "Get over it".

Or some people think "Oh grow up and deal with it"

This is not as easy as people think. It has taken me 8 years to be able to get to where I am today. And to be able to tell my story effectively .

I want to Thank you for your time to listen to My Story.